

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY BONN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9904

INFO AMEMBASSY BERLIN

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

USMISSION USBERLIN

AMCONSUL BREMEN

AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF

AMCONSUL FRANKFURT

AMCONSUL HAMBURG

AMCONSUL MUNICH

AMCONSUL STUTTGART

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, GW

SUBJECT: THE RESURGENCE OF THE FDP

BEGIN SUMMARY: THE STRONG SHOWING OF THE FDP IN RECENT ELECTIONS IN SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN, NORTH RHINE-WESTPHALIA AND THE SAARLAND HAS CONSIDERABLY CHANGED THE FORTUNES OF THE LIBERAL PARTY. THESE SUCCESSES ARE THE RESULT OF LOCAL CONDITIONS BUT MORE SIGNIFICANTLY, THERE APPEARS TO BE A SOLID BLOCK OF VOTERS IN THE FRG WHO SUPPORT THE EXISTENCE OF A NON-EXTREMIST THIRD PARTY. ONLY ONCE IN THE HISTORY OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC HAS A SINGLE PARTY BEEN ABLE TO WIN AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY AND IT IS LIKELY THAT THE LIBERALS WILL CONTINUE TO

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PLAY A CENTRAL ROLE IN THE BALANCE OF GERMAN DOMESTIC

POLITICAL POWER. WHILE A CONFIDENT LIBERAL PARTY MAY BE A MORE ASSERTIVE PARTNER IN THE BONN COALITION, THE PRESENT SITUATION CONTRIBUTES TO COALITION STABILITY, AT LEAST UNTIL THE 1976 BUNDESTAG ELECTIONS. FDP CHAIRMAN GENSCHER'S STRENGTHENED POSITION COULD ALSO HAVE IMPLICATIONS FOR FOREIGN POLICY POSITIONS (E.G., BERLIN) AND FOR HIS RELATIONS WITH CHANCELLOR SCHMIDT.
END SUMMARY

1. THE STRONG SHOWING OF THE FDP IN THE LAST THREE LAENDER ELECTIONS HAS CONSIDERABLY CHANGED THE FORTUNES OF THE LIBERAL PARTY. AT THE BEGINNING OF 1975, FDP POLITICIANS EXPRESSED PRIVATELY DEEP CONCERN ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE PARTY. THINGS WERE SO BAD THAT ONE OF GENSCHER'S PERSONAL ASSISTANTS SAID THAT EVERY DECISION (PRESUMABLY INCLUDING SOME FOREIGN POLICY DECISIONS) HAD TO BE MADE IN LIGHT OF THE POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES IT WOULD HAVE ON THE FORTHCOMING LAENDER ELECTIONS. AT THAT TIME, IT WAS NOT UNTHINKABLE THAT THE PARTY WOULD FALL BELOW THE FIVE PERCENT LEVEL IN THE NORTH RHINE-WESTPHALIAN ELECTION AND HAVE A DESTABILIZING EFFECT ON THE BONN COALITION.

2. IN BERLIN, THE FIRST OF SIX LAENDER ELECTCONS IN 1975, THE FDP SUFFERED A SLIGHT SETBACK, BUT THE LOSS OF THE ABSOLUTE MAJORITY BY THE SPD FORCED THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS TO FORM A COALITION GOVERNMENT WITH THE LIBERALS. IN RHEINLAND-PFALZ, THE PARTY STABILIZED ITS LOSSES AND IN THE NEXT THREE ELECTIONS (SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN, NORTH RHINE-WESTPHALIA, SAARLAND) MADE GAINS OVER PREVIOUS LANDTAG ELECTIONS AND IN THE CASE OF SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN AND THE SAARLAND, RE-ENTERED THE LANDTAG. WHAT ACCOUNTS FOR THE RESURGENCE OF THE FDP? THIS IS A DIFFICULT QUESTION TO ANSWER AND IT IS NOT CERTAIN THAT EVEN THE FDP LEADERSHIP IS CONFIDENT THAT THEY HAVE FIGURED OUT THE SECRET OF SUCCESS.

3. IT MUST BE RECOGNIZED THAT THE FDP IS A SMALL POLITICAL PARTY IN GERMANY WHICH ORDINARILY RECEIVES WELL UNDER TEN PERCENT OF THE VOTE. (THERE IS PROBABLY A LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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HARD CORE FDP VOTE OF BETWEEN FOUR AND FIVE PERCENT.) THE PARTY MEMBERSHIP IS EXTREMELY HETEROGENEOUS AND INCLUDES, AMONG OTHERS, LEFTISTS, ANTI-CLERICS, LIBERALS, ANTI-COLLECTIVISTS, AND ECONOMIC LIBERALS. THIS SAID, THE FDP PLAYS A CENTRAL ROLE ON THE NATIONAL LEVEL BECAUSE ONLY ONCE SINCE 1949 HAS A SINGLE POLITICAL PARTY RECEIVED AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY IN A NATIONAL ELECTION.

AS A CONSEQUENCE, THE FDP HAS BEEN
ABLE TO PLAY A PIVOTAL ROLE IN THE DETERMINATION WHETH-
ER THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS OR THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS
GOVERN.

4. THE FDP'S RECENT SUCCESSES IN THE LAENDER ELECTIONS
ARE THE RESULT OF A NUMBER OF DIFFERENT FACTORS, WHICH
INCLUDE SOME ATTRACTIVE CANDIDATES, GOOD GRASS-ROOTS
ORGANIZATIONAL WORK AND POLITICAL POLARIZATION WHICH
DROVE SOME VOTERS INTO THE MIDDLE. IN ADDITION,

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AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
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FOREIGN MINISTER GENSCHER, THE FDP PARTY CHAIRMAN, APPEARS TO BE SLOWLY GAINING CONTROL OVER THE PARTY WHICH HAS INCREASED HIS SELF-CONFIDENCE. EARLIER, WHEN GENSCHER WAS COMING UNDER CONSIDERABLE CRITICISM IN THE PARTY, ONE POLITICIAN TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER THAT IT WAS COMMON FOR NEW FDP LEADERS TO GO THROUGH A VERY TRYING PERIOD AT THE BEGINNING. EVEN, HE SAID, WALTER SCHEEL, ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR FDP LEADERS, HAD A TOUGH TIME WHEN HE BECAME PARTY CHAIRMAN.

5. IT IS ESPECIALLY INTERESTING THAT THE FDP IS DOING WELL AT A TIME WHEN THE SMALL PARTIES OF THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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EXTREME RIGHT AND LEFT HAVE SUFFERED GREAT LOSSES AT THE POLLS. PERHAPS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT FACTOR FAVORING THE FDP IN THE RECENT ELECTIONS (ESPECIALLY LOOKING AHEAD TO THE 1976 NATIONAL ELECTIONS) IS THAT THERE APPEARS TO BE A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF VOTERS WHO, ON THE ONE HAND, DO NOT WISH TO SEE THE SOCIAL-LIBERAL COALITION DEFEATED BUT FOR A NUMBER OF REASONS CANNOT BRING THEMSELVES TO VOTE FOR THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS. THERE IS ANOTHER GROUP WHO FEEL THAT THE EXISTENCE OF A SMALL "MIDDLE PARTY"

IS NECESSARY IN THE FRG. WHILE THE FDP HAS LOST SOME OF ITS APPEAL AS A BRAKE ON THE MORE RADICAL PROGRAMS OF THE SPD (SPD CHANCELLOR SCHMIDT IS HIMSELF A BRAKE ON THESE TENDENCIES) IT STILL PROVIDES A MEANS OF KEEPING A SOCIALLY ORIENTED GOVERNMENT IN POWER WITHOUT GIVING THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS AN ABSOLUTELY FREE HAND.

6. FOLLOWING THESE RECENT SUCCESSES IT CAN BE EXPECTED THAT THE FDP WILL BE MORE CONFIDENT AND ASSERTIVE WITHIN THE BONN COALITION WHICH COULD CREATE OCCASIONAL TENSIONS. HOWEVER, NOW THAT THE LIBERALS HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN THE IMPORTANT LAENDER ELECTIONS, THEY ARE LESS LIKELY TO BE SKITTISH AND UNPREDICTABLE AS A COALITION PARTNER. NOW THE SPD NEED NOT BE TOO CONCERNED THAT A PANICKY JUNIOR PARTNER MIGHT SEEK A COALITION WITH THE CDU BEFORE NOVEMBER 1976. EVEN IF THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS ARE FORCED TO MAKE MORE CONCESSIONS TO THE FDP ABOUT FUTURE REFORMS THAN THEY HAD TO IN THE PAST, AN ALLIANCE WITH A MORE STABLE AND SECURE LIBERAL PARTY SHOULD HELP THE COALITION TO ACCOMPLISH SOME OF THE PROMISED REFORMS BEFORE NEXT YEAR'S BUNDESTAG ELECTIONS.

7. THE CDU, AWARE OF HOW DIFFICULT IT WILL BE TO OBTAIN AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY IN THE 1976 BUNDESTAG ELECTIONS, MAINTAINS DISCREET CONTACT WITH KEY FDP OFFICIALS

IN ORDER TO KEEP CHANNELS OPEN FOR FUTURE DISCUSSIONS
ABOUT A FDP/CDU COALITION.

8. WE HAVE SUGGESTED IN PAST COMMENTS ON GENSCHER'S
PERFORMANCE AS FOREIGN MINISTER THAT THE VERY VULNER-
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ABLE POSITION OF THE FDP IN GERMAN DOMESTIC POLITICS,
AND HIS OWN VULNERABILITY AS A NEW AND UNSURE PARTY
CHAIRMAN, SEEMED TO PUT GENSCHER UNDER PRESSURE TO
APPEAR DYNAMIC AND "NATIONAL" ON CERTAIN ISSUES, NOTA-
BLY BERLIN. THIS FACTOR, WE THOUGHT, ACCOUNTED AT
LEAST IN PART FOR GENSCHER'S ROLE IN THE ESTABLISHMENT
OF THE FEDERAL ENVIRONMENT AGENCY IN BERLIN IN THE
SUMMER OF 1973, AND ALSO THE MORE RECENT ESTABLISHMENT
OF THE EC VOCATIONAL CENTER THERE. NOW THAT THE
FDP'S POSITION HAS BEEN SO MARKEDLY STRENGTHENED AND
GENSCHER'S PERSONAL POSITION IN THE PARTY AND THE

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INFO AMEMBASSY BERLIN

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COALITION CORRESPONDINGLY IMPROVED, IT MIGHT SEEM TO FOLLOW THAT WE COULD ANTICIPATE A FALLING OFF OF ANY COMPULSION ON HIS PART TO PUSH HARD IN BERLIN MATTERS. BUT IT IS TOO EARLY TO REACH SUCH A CONCLUSION. IT COULD BE THAT GENSCHER BELIEVES SOME OF THE FDP'S AND HIS OWN SUCCESS IN LAENDER ELECTIONS IN PAST MONTHS HAS BEEN DUE TO HIS REPUTATION FOR TAKING A STRONG ROLE ON BERLIN. A VERY SENSITIVE MAN, GENSCHER HAS FELT IN THE PAST THAT CHANCELLOR SCHMIDT HAS PREEMPTED SOME FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES. IT WILL BE INTERESTING TO SEE IF GENSCHER, GIVEN HIS ENHANCED POWER BASE, WILL BECOME MORE ASSERTIVE IN HIS RELATIONS WITH THE CHANCELLOR.
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9. AN INTERESTING FOOTNOTE ON GENSCHER, NOW THAT HIS POSITION HAS BEEN CONSOLIDATED, IS THE SOVIET ATTITUDE TOWARD HIM. IT IS AN OPEN SECRET IN BONN THAT SOVIET AMBASSADOR FALIN AND THE SOVIET EMBASSY GENERALLY HAS RUN A CONSISTENTLY ANTI-GENSCHER CAMPAIGN FOR SOME TIME. THE LOCAL SOVIETS HAVE BEEN SUPPORTED IN THIS EFFORT BY ELEMENTS ON THE WEST GERMAN SIDE, NOTABLY THE MAGAZINE "SPIEGEL," WHICH TAKE A DECIDED ANTI-GENSCHER LINE. WE HAVE THOUGHT THIS PERFORMANCE BY FALIN RATHER CURIOUS. IT WOULD NOT SEEM TO MAKE MUCH SENSE FOR THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR TO ANTAGONIZE THE FOREIGN MINISTER. THE RATIONALE OF THE FALIN CAMPAIGN, THE SOVIETS HAVE SUGGESTED, WAS TO BRING CHANCELLOR SCHMIDT PERSONALLY INTO THE OSTPOLITIK PICTURE, AND SPECIFICALLY SOVIET-GERMAN RELATIONS, IN ORDER TO PRODUCE POSITIVE MOVEMENT. FALIN'S CAMPAIGN, WE IMAGINE, ONLY SERVED TO GET THE FOREIGN MINISTER'S BACK UP. WE HAVE PREVIOUSLY SUGGESTED THAT FALIN HAS FELT HIMSELF UNDER PRESSURE FROM MOSCOW TO LOOK TOUGH ON GERMANY, AND PERHAPS HE WAS COVERING HIMSELF WITH HIS SUPERIORS IN HIS ANTI-GENSCHER EFFORTS. NOW, HOWEVER, WITH GENSCHER MORE FIRMLY IN THE SADDLE THAN EVER AS FDP CHAIRMAN AND FOREIGN MINISTER, AND WITH FDP SUPPORT A CRUCIAL FACTOR IN THE

SPD'S ABILITY TO GOVERN THE COALITION BOTH NATIONALLY
AND IN MANY OF THE LAENDER, FALIN WOULD SEEM TO HAVE
STRUCK OUT BADLY. IT WILL BE INTERESTING TO SEE HOW
THE SOVIET EMBASSY ADJUSTS TO THESE REALITIES.
HILLENBRAND

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